

TWENTY FEET FROM STARDOM
By Lorraine Viade, Psy.D.



Twenty Feet from Stardom is a wonderful documentary that tells the stories of the well sung heroes who provide the essential vocal support to those famous singers who we pay such high prices to see. Without their background voices, most concerts would lack depth, richness and the magic that is harmony. The women and family members who tell their stories are divas in spirit and could have been stars in their own right. Their destiny, however, was not to be in the spotlight. I know I have heard these powerful voices live and on the myriad of recordings that I own. Now I have a much higher appreciation of their history, their struggles and their talent. The contribution of women of color to the industry has been sadly overlooked until now.

The headliners are on-board to give props to their back-ups. Legends such as Stevie Wonder and Mick Jagger fully acknowledge the rich contributions of these singers. The praise is well-deserved. Mary Clayton and Darlene Love are two of the women prominently featured in the film. These singers have staying power and still share their talent with the world irrespective of age or looks. To listen to their stories, and see how much they mean to the soundtrack of our lives, was moving and poetic. Without them in the mix, many standards and classics would be flat and soul-less. From the days of early exploitation to the attempts at breaking out into solo careers, these lives have been well lived and their recognition well-deserved.

Twenty Feet from Stardom is also a reminder of how having and living a dream are more valuable than fame or fortune. These performers know that very well. They are praised and valued by those who employ them and have the kind of resilience that transcends the ups and downs of the music industry. They are survivors. They know their worth and they bring it to each session. Sadly, with more and more music and performers depending on electronic enhancement of their abilities, there is less and less call for their excellence. This is a shame. Their contribution to the history of music is timeless and continues to bring joy to a wide range of music lovers everywhere.

You will enjoy their journeys and be inspired by their love of the sound of the human voice. Phil Spector had no idea what the wall of sound truly was. It was those singers who held up the stars and held nothing back. Bravo!

I give *Twenty Feet from Stardom* five lovely and talented backup singers.

